Simple Repair of a 4X5 Inch Film Holder

James R. Kyle, Photographer

In the reading of different pages on Facebook, as well as an assortment of "blogs", someone, from time to time, asks about "Light-Leaks". Most often, with the use of a large format camera, this is because of the cloth-rubber (or nylon) bellows. If the light leaks are on ALL of the negatives and in the same area - this is a Bellows Leak. However - if the light leak is only showing on one or both sides of a particular film holder - it is a bad holder and not the bellows.

"Light leaks" effecting the negative sometimes come from other sources than a defective bellows. The leak can come from a "Lens-Board", or a separation of the wooden rear "box" of an older camera. Then, too, there is the film holder. Usually the light leak with a film holder is because of a worn, and or, defective cloth tape at one end of the holder. This is usually detected by a "spoiled" negative that has "streaks" or a blotchy look to the negative in one or both of the sides of a particular holder.

I have had this occur and the easiest way to solve, or repair, is to take off the old worn tape and replace it with one inch wide "Gaffer's Tape". If that is not readily at hand, I have used "Black Duct-Tape" — (Hey! Don't laugh - it works, till I can do a proper repair).

Here - and illustrated with photos (of course) is my way of doing this simple repair. And - Anyone can do this.

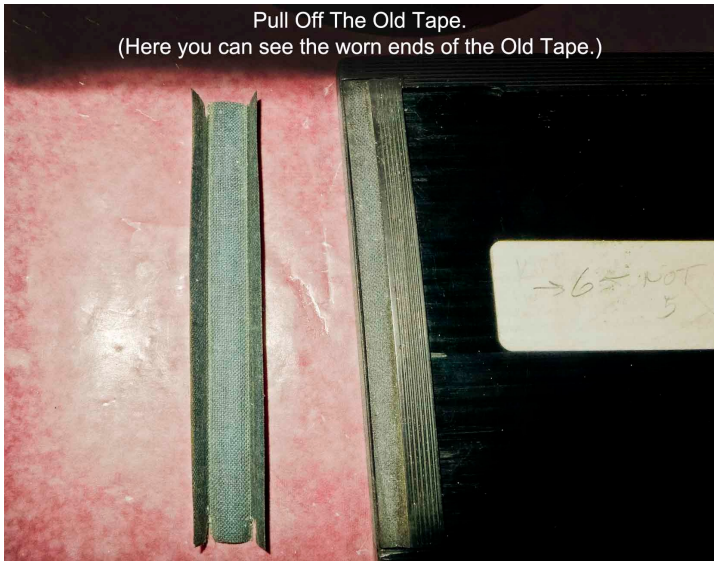
First, after examining the holder carefully, you may see a worn part of the old tape at the end of the holder. (The tape acts as a "hinge" to permit the sliding in of a sheet of film into the holder.) Remove the defective tape from the holder and two small end parts will come off from the body of the holder. Take out the "Dark Slide" and clean with naphtha ("Lighter Fluid"), to remove any old tape adhesive residue from all parts where the tape was. Sometimes this is easy. Other times the residue is stubborn and will require a more aggressive approach, with the use of a scrubbing "Scotch-Brite" pad. (Some old film holders are of wood construction - it is advisable to go GENTLY. Also the naphtha WILL remove the paint on the wood as well.) After all the old adhesive is removed, place the little end pieces back into their proper place and slide back in the "Dark Slide" to hold these "little end parts" together.

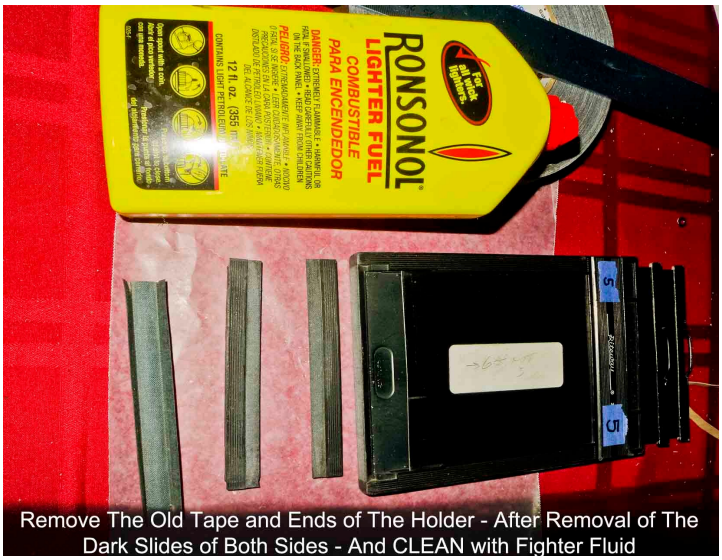
Hopefully you have a roll of one inch gaffer's tape. (If not, you will soon feel the need to keep a roll of this stuff in your camera carrying box.) If you do not - get some and keep it handy. ((Yeah! It IS the "photographer's Fix-All item".))

You do not have to make a measurement of the piece of tape, just tear off an a section that looks like it will be in the ballpark. Place the end of the holder down onto the center of the tape. (Make sure that it IS the center.) Then with a rubbing motion, make secure the tape is adhering to the holder. With an “Exacto-Knife” make the cuts to fit the “Little End” parts of the holder - and NOT the total length of the back of the total area. Then - cut off the excess.

Now .... Wasn’t that simple? The good thing is that this simple repair will last for years, even decades.

Here you may see the worn ends of the “Hinge-Tape” that was the problem and causing a “Light-Leak” to the interior.


Pull Off The Old Tape.
(Here you can see the worn ends of the Old Tape.)



Remove The Old Tape and Ends of The Holder - After Removal of The Dark Slides of Both Sides - And CLEAN with Fighter Fluid

After Removing Old Tape And Cleaning
Replace The dark Slides in BOTH SIDES

I hope that this little article will assist you in the repair of your film holders. It is not a question as to the IF it shall happen. It IS the question as to just WHEN it shall happen.

Thank you for reading.

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